

March 19, 2004

## Troops in Hawaii Headed to Afghanistan

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 4:06 a.m. ET

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, Hawaii (AP) -- Military leaders, politicians and family members were on hand to see off 5,000 soldiers for a year in Afghanistan, the largest single troop movement in the history of the Hawaii-based Army's 25th Infantry Division (Light).

Children waved signs at Thursday's emotional deployment ceremony for their fathers and mothers, including one girl who held one that read: "Daddy, your the man."

"I'm an American. I believe in this country and I believe in what it stands for and I wanted to do my part," said Pfc. Gilbert Villalobos, 35, of Pico Rivera, Calif.

Villalobos, who is helping to raise a young son, said he left his career as an X-ray technician to join the Army in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. "After 9-11, it really shook me up and I just wanted to my job and help out," he said.

After a ceremonial inspection of the troops, Division commander Maj. Gen. Eric Olson -- who is also being deployed -- told the crowd that the United States is committed to ensure that enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan may never again "use those two nations as a launching pad for terrorists against our territories and our people."

Gov. Linda Lingle, Sen. Daniel Inouye and American Samoa Gov. Togiola Tulafono also attended. Lingle spoke about her recent trip to Iraq, saying it was a unique opportunity "to witness a land in turmoil where people are struggling to forge a democracy that so many Americans here at home take for granted."

"This fight our nation has undertaken is especially difficult because we're battling an enemy that hides in the shadows," she said.

Soldiers will be sent to the Middle East in groups though the end of April, joining the 4,000 division troops already in Iraq on one-year deployments. Schofield will be left with about 2,000 soldiers, leaving nearby Wahiawa a ghost town.

Staff Sgt. James Ray, 31, of San Antonio, Texas, said he's eager to go.

"We're all excited to do good things," he said. "We got a couple of bad guys we have to look for."

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On the Net:

25th Infantry Division (Light): <http://www.25idl.army.mil/index.asp>

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